

*Original Paper*

# Developing a Multi-dimensional Framework for Cultivating Intercultural Critical Thinking in College English Listening-Speaking Teaching

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## ***Abstract***

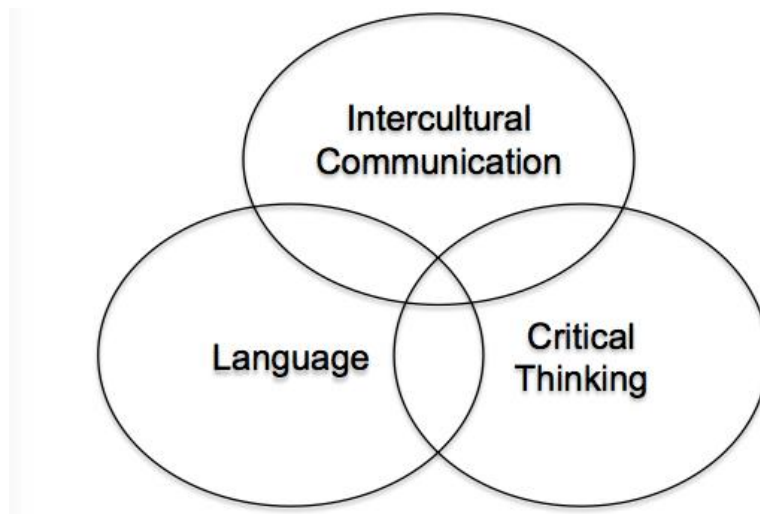
*Based on the theory of communicative language ability, this study integrates international and domestic standards such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) and China's Standards of English Language Ability (CSE) to construct a cross-cultural and critical-thinking-oriented framework for English listening and speaking skills through localized adaptation. The research demonstrates how to flexibly reference existing language frameworks and make personalized adjustments to meet the practical needs of teaching and assessment at the local university. Employing a mixed-methods approach, which includes literature analysis, expert discussions, and empirical investigation, a three-level (Benchmark-Milestone-Capstone) descriptor bank comprising 149 core descriptors was established, covering both cognitive skills and affective dimensions. The study not only integrates international and domestic standards with institutional characteristics but also explores a pathway for cultivating cross-cultural critical thinking abilities rooted in the local educational ecosystem and aligned with institutional training objectives. Further refinement of the framework will be conducted through questionnaire validation and teaching practice, providing a solution for reforming English language teaching in higher education that combines global perspectives with institutional distinctiveness.*

## **1. Background**

The CEFR states "Language systems are highly complex. The languages of large, diverse, and developed societies have never been fully mastered by anyone"; "no language has ever been completely and exhaustively described," and "no model of linguistic description has achieved universal acceptance" (pp. 108-109). Therefore, when applying the CEFR or the like, it is essential to refer to its multi-level, multi-dimensional language proficiency scales and select the competence parameters that align with the

specific school and curriculum, ensuring the syllabus is tailored and precise (Liang Dandan, Song Yu, & Su Yini, 2018). Thus, the use of the CEFR should be flexible and individualized, rather than rigidly adhered to in a one-size-fits-all manner.

Critical thinking and intercultural communication are inseparable and closely interconnected (Wang, 2018; Zhang & Yao, 2023; Hu & Zhang, 2023; Hu, Xu, & Li, 2023). Enhancing critical thinking is a prerequisite for improving intercultural communication (Deardorff, 2006:254), while the assessment of critical thinking is also a vital component and an integral part of evaluating intercultural communication (Paul & Elder, 2005:29; Shen & Gao, 2015:149). A new model of English teaching that integrates language skills, critical thinking, and intercultural competence as shared objectives is both necessary and feasible.



**Figure 1. The Relationship between Intercultural Communication, Critical Thinking, and Language (Wang, 2018)**

Intercultural communicative competence demonstrates progressively advancing proficiency targets within our institution's levelled language instruction system. The first level course focuses on acquiring, understanding, and exchanging cultural knowledge; the second level emphasizes comparison and application of cultural knowledge; while the third level concentrates on cultivating students' abilities in evaluation and creation in intercultural communications.

## **2. Theoretical Base & Research Objectives**

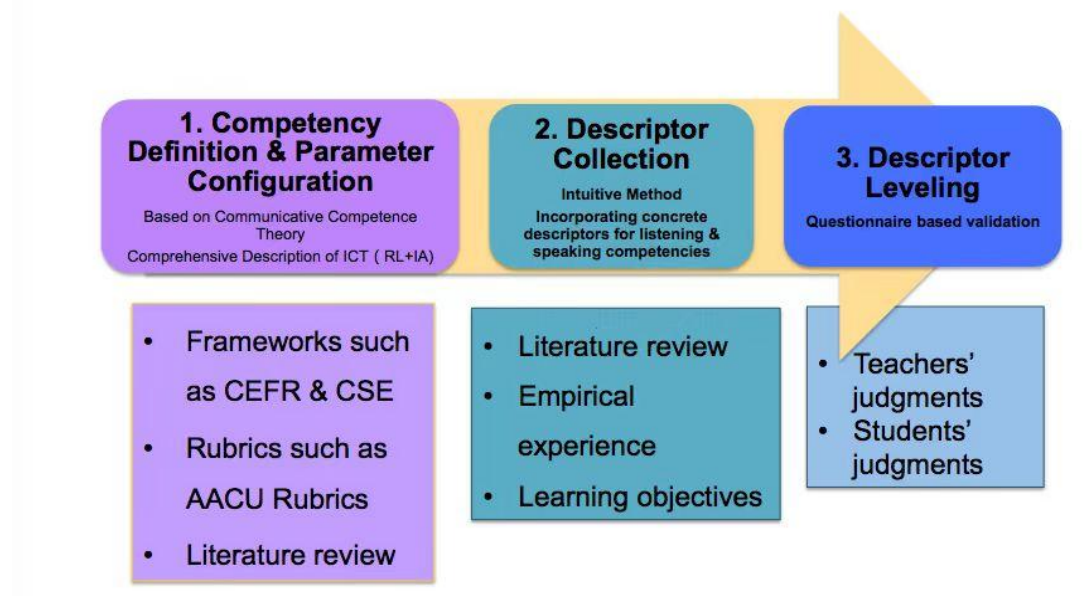
The core objective of establishing a language proficiency framework is to scientifically define the characteristics of language ability, provide systematic descriptions, and accordingly delineate distinct proficiency levels. This study adopts Bachman's (1990) theory of communicative language ability as its theoretical framework for defining and describing language competencies. By integrating the Real-life Approach and the Interactional Ability Approach, the research achieves complementary advantages while

maintaining both inclusiveness and practical applicability.

The development of the CEFR and the CSE generally underwent three main phases. The first phase involved intuitive judgment, during which developers modified collected descriptors, screening and categorizing them based on intuition. The second phase involved a qualitative analysis, during which experts and teachers collaboratively discussed and determined the descriptor categories. The third phase focused on quantitative analysis, utilizing methods such as questionnaire surveys to gather data for evaluating descriptor quality (North & Docherty, 2016; Liu Jianda, 2021).

Therefore, drawing on both the CEFR and the CSE as key benchmarks, this study integrates intuitive, qualitative, and quantitative methodologies. It is grounded in the practical experiences of language learning, teaching, and assessment, while also being informed by relevant language ability theories. By leveraging quantitative methods to obtain data support, parameters and hierarchical structures are established, enabling the graded description of specific competencies. Ultimately, this process leads to the development of an integrated multi-skill listening and speaking framework tailored to the institution's practical teaching objectives as well as the unique characteristics and needs of its students.

### 3. Framework Construction Methods & Procedures



**Figure 2. Methods and Procedures for Developing an Integrated English Listening and Speaking Framework Oriented toward Intercultural Critical Thinking in Higher Education**

Based on the theory of communicative language ability (Bachman, 1990; North, 2000; Fang Xujun, Yang Huizhong, & Zhu Zhengcai, 2008; Liu Jianda, 2015), this study draws upon the CEFR, CSE, AACU Rubrics, Linguaskill Speaking Global Assessment Criteria, as well as TOEFL and IELTS listening and speaking descriptors and literature research to formulate an overarching conceptualization of intercultural critical thinking competence and establish corresponding parameters. Subsequently, through intuitive

methods and literature review, researchers collected descriptors based on the theoretical framework of communicative language ability, practical experience, and institutional curriculum objectives, providing detailed specifications for intercultural critical thinking-oriented listening and speaking abilities.

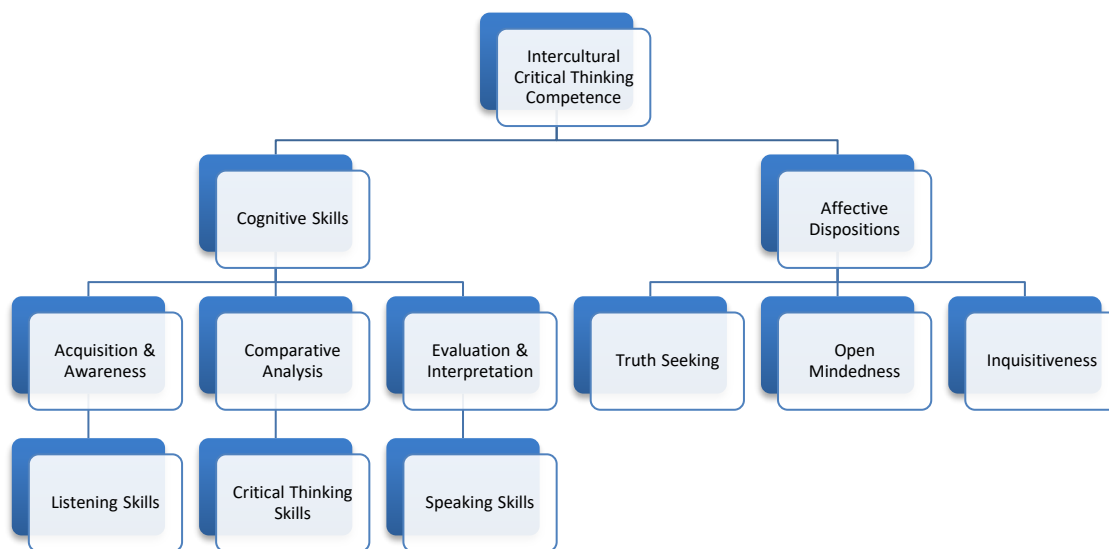
### *3.1 Competency Definition & Parameter Configuration*

As is widely recognized, the CEFR adopts an action-oriented approach, while China's English Listening Proficiency Scale employs a practicality-oriented methodology. Recognizing the respective strengths of these two major frameworks, this study draws upon existing frameworks—the CEFR and the China Standards of English—and utilizes literature analysis and qualitative methods to formulate a comprehensive description of intercultural critical thinking competence. The literature review incorporates institutional English curriculum syllabi and course objectives.

The dual-dimensional structure of intercultural critical thinking (cognitive skills + affective disposition) originates from the intercultural competence model (Byram, 1997) and integrates with critical thinking theory (Facione, 1990), having been applied to foreign language teaching research by Chinese scholars (e.g., Zhang Hongling & Yao Chunyu, 2020; Sun Youzhong, 2019; Lin Xiao & He Lianzhen, 2017). Intercultural critical thinking competence is defined in this study as a comprehensive ability encompassing two primary dimensions: cognitive skills and affective disposition. Cognitive skills include capacities such as acquisition and understanding, comparison and analysis, evaluation and interpretation, emphasizing evidence-based and logical reasoning within cross-cultural contexts. Affective disposition manifests as attitudes of truth-seeking, open-mindedness, and inquisitiveness, motivating individuals to proactively adapt to multicultural environments.

According to the CEFR framework, this competence requires not only the completion of specific intercultural communication tasks (such as understanding perspectives from different cultures) but also mastery of the intrinsic logic between linguistic forms and viewpoints, coupled with enhanced sensitivity to cultural differences through reflective activities. Building upon this comprehensive description and grounded in our institution's educational objectives for developing intercultural communicative competence, we maintain that critical thinking activities should drive intercultural practice, thereby completing the integrated listening and speaking framework oriented towards intercultural critical thinking competence.

Accordingly, the parameter framework of this integrated model is structured as follows:



**Figure 3. Integrated Parameter Framework for Intercultural Critical Thinking Competence**

### 3.2 Descriptor Collection

Within the defined competency scope and guided by the Integrated Parameter Framework for Intercultural Critical Thinking Competence (Figure 3), a descriptor bank was developed through literature analysis and intuitive methods, incorporating researchers' teaching experience and teacher interviews, while grounded in the institutional curriculum objectives for intercultural critical thinking. This study employed a multi-source data collection approach:

1) **Literature Analysis Method:**

- Systematically reviewed listening and speaking descriptors and dimensional indicators from the *CEFR*
- Integrated listening and speaking descriptors and dimensional indicators from the *China Standards of English*
- Referenced assessment criteria for "Intercultural Competence" and "Critical Thinking" from AACU's VALUE Rubrics
- Analyzed listening and speaking components in speaking assessment criteria of international tests such as IELTS and TOEFL

2) **Expert Intuitive Method:**

- Established a core team comprising 8 frontline instructors
- Conducted multiple rounds of workshops to generate initial descriptors based on the study's integrated parameter framework, institutional curriculum structure, course objectives, and students' competency performance in typical teaching scenarios

Through these two systematically implemented steps, a comprehensive bank of descriptors for intercultural critical thinking competence and listening and speaking skills was established, currently containing 149 core descriptors.

### *3.3 Descriptor Scaling & Leveling*

Aligned with the leveled structure of the institution's English curriculum and the developmental objectives for intercultural communicative competence outlined in the syllabi across three course levels, the descriptors have been categorized into three progressive levels (Benchmark, Milestone, Capstone). This process involved initial refinement and quantification of competency descriptors.

## **4. Conclusion**

Research on intercultural critical thinking competence and the listening-speaking teaching it informs must be grounded in the local educational ecosystem, closely aligned with institutional talent development objectives, and deeply embedded within the university-level curriculum goal system. This study, based on the theory of communicative language ability, drew upon the CEFR, CSE, AACU Rubrics, Linguaskill Speaking Global Assessment Criteria, as well as TOEFL and IELTS listening and speaking descriptors and related literature to formulate a comprehensive conceptualization of intercultural critical thinking competence and establish corresponding parameters. Subsequently, through intuitive methods and document analysis, researchers collected descriptors based on the theoretical framework of communicative language ability, practical experience, and institutional curriculum objectives, providing detailed specifications for intercultural critical thinking-oriented listening and speaking abilities. This process led to the development of a new, integrated, multidimensional framework for teaching English listening and speaking in higher education, guided by intercultural critical thinking competence.

In the next phase, the research team will select descriptors that characterize the intercultural critical thinking competencies of non-English major undergraduates at our university and compile them into a questionnaire. Both teachers and students will be asked to evaluate the listening and speaking abilities described in these descriptors, thereby validating the initial difficulty rankings of the descriptors and enabling further refinement and optimization. Looking ahead, the team will utilize this integrated framework to explore the pilot implementation of teaching modules, practice the design of classroom activities that synthesize multiple competencies, and assess students' integrated abilities

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